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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000117

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SUBJECT: THE ARS "PATRIOTIC WING"

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: With Sheikh Hassen Dahir Aweys still in Khartoum, senior representatives of the hard-line ARS faction met with emboffs in Asmara April 8. They were dismissive of the TFG's limited writ in Somalia and claimed an "inclusive" peace process was needed. Sheikh Aweys, invited to Sudan by the NCP's Foreign Affairs Department, "might return to Asmara or he might go to Mogadishu." All three ARS interlocutors identified themselves as members of the ARS "Patriotic Wing" and warned that Sheikh Sharif was a dyed-in-the-wool Islamist who would eventually show his true colors. Nevertheless, they opined that al-Shabaab somehow needed to be brought into a comprehensive political process. The current UN SRSG was biased, they contended, and should be replaced by a Scandinavian. The ARS Patriotic Wing seemed out of step with present Somali political culture and more in line with the philosophy of the Isaias regime. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Meeting with the ARS Patriot Wing  
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The ambassador and poloff met April 8 at the Peacebuilding Center for the Horn of Africa with three senior officials of the Aweys hard-line faction of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS). Ahmed Abdi Hashi, chairman of the faction's International Relations Bureau, was the senior interlocutor. Now a Canadian citizen, Ambassador Hashi has served as Somalia's ambassador to the UN and East Germany. As a younger man he founded a Somali socialist political organization. He was accompanied by Amina Warsame Adam ("Secretary of the Human Rights") and "Inspector General" Mahad Sheikh. Adam is a UK citizen and Sheikh, like Hashi, is a Canadian.

¶3. (C) About Aweys  
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Aweys was still in Khartoum and definitely did not go there to negotiate with Sheikh Sharif, they emphasized. The officials said they didn't know if Aweys would return to Asmara or go to Mogadishu. He traveled to Khartoum, not as a guest of the Government of Sudan, they said, but at the invitation of the Foreign Affairs Department of the National Congress Party. While Hashi, Adam, and Sheikh all identified themselves as part of the ARS Patriotic Wing, when asked if Aweys was also a member, they replied in unison, "No."

¶4. (C) The "De-Grouping" of the ARS

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Ambassador Hashi blamed SRSG Ould-Abdallah for persuading ARS Chairman Sheikh Sharif to sign a supposedly secret protocol in April 2008 that violated the ARS tenants and charter. Hashi lamented that Sharif did so without the approval of the ARS Central Committee. The ensuing disagreement within the ARS resulted in some members supporting the Djibouti process, others rejecting it. The rejectionist camp was further split, according to Hashi, when Aweys sent militant Islamist representatives to Somali "to unite the resistance." Instead, this group broke from the Aweys ARS faction and became a component of Hezbul Islam, which Adam characterized as "sort of like a reconstituted Islamic Courts Union." Later, they continued, the former ARS Defense Chairman Indha Adde "de-grouped" from Hezbul Islam to strike an advantageous deal for himself and his gunmen. The interlocutors noted ruefully that the endemic ARS "de-grouping" was typical of Somali politics.

15. (C) On Sheikh Sharif and the Islamists  
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Ambassador Hashi provided a detailed (and as far as we could tell) pretty accurate description of who controls what in Somalia. Switching to a derisive tone, he said Sheikh Sharif is holed up in a hotel in northern Mogadishu in a neighborhood controlled by his sub-sub-sub clan, where "he is protected by Amisom's armored cars." Sharif commands a total of 12 tanks, Hashi added. He argued that the TFG controls little territory, has almost no writ anywhere in the country,

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and that al-Shabaab dominates southern Somalia. Our Somali interlocutors warned that the international community should not be duped by Sheikh Sharif posing as a moderate Islamist and wondered aloud "who do you think will interpret Sharia law in Somalia?" Adam, clad in a blouse, slacks, and a headscarf, said she did not want the Islamists to control Somalia because of the potentially negative impact on women's rights. "I couldn't go to Somalia wearing slacks," she noted. (Her anti-TFG stance derives from the belief that her husband was murdered by or on the orders of former TFG President Yusuf a number of years ago.)

16. (C) An "Inclusive" Peace Process Wanted  
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Hashi argued that the imbalance between the TFG's international recognition and support and the territorial control of al-Shabaab and other members of "the resistance" somehow needed to be squared before Somalia could be at peace. The Sharif-led TFG has been still-born, he averred, because the Djibouti process excluded key "stakeholders." He posited a future gathering of all stakeholders to agree on a common way ahead. When the ambassador commented that the United States would oppose the involvement of a terrorist organization in governing Somalia, Hashi said Shabaab needs to be included and provocatively suggested we delist Shabaab but designate particularly dangerous individuals within the organization, thus opening the political process to non-ideological members. Surprisingly, he suggested that such a confab could perhaps be held in Hargeysa, providing that the status of Somaliland not be discussed. Ambassador Hashi, once a schoolteacher in Somaliland, said he remembered Somaliland's five days of de jure independence in 1960 and commented that things seem to be working pretty well there nowadays.

17. (C) COMMENT  
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Ambassador Hashi, a dapper and seasoned diplomat, would fit in well in a gathering of the Socialist International or at conferences in Davos or Durban. Yet, he and his colleagues in the ARS Patriot Wing seem oddly out of step with the

realities on the ground in Somalia in 2009. It also seems ironic that all three leaders of the ARS Patriotic Wing are citizens of Western countries. While they were open about all sorts of intra-ARS "de-groupings," they seemed genuinely unclear about the future of Sheikh Aweys. The ARS Patriotic Wing probably won't have a role to play in Somali politics anytime soon, although the country would benefit from the talents of worldly, educated, and secular individuals that comprise its leadership. The Eritrean regime likely finds the ARS Patriotic Wing's rhetoric reassuringly familiar to its own; it probably also resonates with some older professionals of the Somali Diaspora.

MCMULLEN